

Charles Palissot

The Philosophes



EDITED AND TRANSLATED JESSICA GOODMAN ET AL.



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Introduction¹

Charles Palissot de Montenoy was born on 3 January 1730, and lived until the age of eighty-four. Despite his long life, and the publication of at least sixteen plays, poems and treatises, if he is remembered at all today it is for his 1760 play, *Les Philosophes*. This satirical attack on Diderot and the other authors of the *Encyclopédie*,² best known for a scene in which a caricature of Jean-Jacques Rousseau enters the stage on all fours eating leaves, was at the centre of a bitter literary and political quarrel in the early 1760s, which resulted in its author losing his protectors and his literary reputation.³

According to his own *Mémoires*, Palissot was destined to enter the church, taking a philosophy degree aged just eleven.⁴ However, at the age of sixteen he wrote his first tragedy, and two years later he produced *Zarès*, which was performed at the Comédie-Française in 1751. It was during the production of this play that he first became closely linked to the Comte de Stainville (later the Duc de Choiseul),⁵ who as his protector would introduce him to the Princesse de Robecq⁶ and the Comtesse de

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- 1 Parts of this introduction are a direct translation (by Jessica Goodman) from Olivier Ferret's *Préface* to his 2002 edition (*La Comédie des Philosophes et autres textes* (Sainte-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Sainte-Étienne, 2002)), which also contains a number of the 'quarrel' texts. Translations from Ferret are signalled by the use of italics. T.J. Barling's introduction to his 1975 edition (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1975) was vital in providing supplementary information about the play's performance and publication.
 - 2 For an online version of the *Encyclopédie*, see <https://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>. A translation of many articles can be found here: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/>
 - 3 Gregory S. Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 168–69.
 - 4 *Mémoires sur la vie de l'auteur* in *Œuvres de M. Palissot* (Liège: Clément Plomteux, 1777), I, pp. x–xxxix.
 - 5 Étienne François, Duc de Choiseul (1719–1785), Foreign minister of France between 1758–1761 and 1766–1770.
 - 6 Anne-Marie de Montmorency-Luxembourg (1729–1760), who became Louis XV's mistress in 1749.

la Marck.⁷ All three would play significant roles in the later story of *Les Philosophes*.

In 1753, Palissot, along with Fréron⁸ (another significant figure in his later life), was received by the Académie de Nancy. The Académie had been created by King Stanislas,⁹ the dedicatee of Palissot's incomplete *L'Histoire des rois de Rome* (1753); a text that his biographer, Daniel Delafarge, describes as inspired by the very same contemporary philosophy that Palissot would later critique.¹⁰ In the autumn of the following year, his comedy *Les Tuteurs* was successfully performed at the Comédie-Française, and published with a preface dedicated to the Comtesse de la Marck.

Palissot and the Anti-Philosophes

The 1760 *Les Philosophes* was not Palissot's first foray into satire. In 1755 he created a scandal with his *Le Cercle ou les originaux*, which brought to the stage of Nancy's main theatre — among other things — an educated woman, an infatuated poet, and Rousseau, the 'philosophe'. Rousseau appeared under the guise of 'Blaise-Nicodème le Cosmopolite', who is accused of putting forward 'des paradoxes bizarres' (scene viii) to no philosophical end, but solely to make himself a name. The 'cercle' of the title is a group of writers creating an encyclopaedia. The play therefore marked Palissot's first direct attack on the 'sect' that would be his target in the later play: Diderot and d'Alembert as editors of the *Encyclopédie*, as well as Helvétius, Rousseau, and other exponents of the 'new philosophy' of the period, which claimed to use scientific method and reason to re-evaluate the dogmatic pronouncements of the past. *Le Cercle* incited a general outcry from the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, as well as demands that Palissot should be expelled from the Nancy Académie. The Princesse de Robecq intervened in Palissot's favour; King Stanislas, on the other

7 Louise-Marguerite, Comtesse de la Marck (1730–1820), wife of Charles Marie Raymond d'Arenberg (1721–1778), 5th Duke of Arenberg and an Austrian Field Marshal.

8 Élie-Catherine Fréron (1718–1776), literary critic and author of the *Année littéraire*, continued by his son, Stanislas.

9 King Stanislas Leszczyński (1677–1766), King of Poland, Duke of Lorraine, and a count of the Holy Roman Empire.

10 Daniel Delafarge, *La Vie et l'œuvre de Palissot (1730–1814)* (Paris: Hachette, 1912).

hand, was more minded to side with his detractors; with the result that the finished 1756 edition of the *Histoire des rois de Rome* was no longer dedicated to the King, but instead to the Comtesse de la Marck.

The reaction of the encyclopédistes further stoked Palissot's ire. In 1757, he published his *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes* (dedicated to the *Princesse de Robecq*), in which he mocked this 'sect' of wise men, reserving his most scathing attacks for Diderot and his play *Le Fils naturel*, which he critiqued roundly, in particular accusing it (incorrectly) of being plagiarised from the Italian author Carlo Goldoni.¹¹ Following the publication of the *Petites lettres*, two translations of Goldoni's play appeared, which included false dedications to Madame la Princesse de ***** and Madame la Comtesse de ***; thinly-veiled references to Palissot's two protectors (who, along with Choiseul, had also recently had to bail Palissot out financially). These translations embarrassed both Palissot and his patrons, and — convinced that Diderot was the perpetrator — he made him the central target of his later play.

Palissot's campaign was taken up by other critics of modern philosophy. In the period 1757–1758, whilst public interest was still occupied with the failed assassination attempt on Louis XV by former soldier and domestic servant Damiens,¹² the Abbé Giry of Saint-Cyr¹³ and the lawyer Moreau¹⁴ orchestrated the 'Cacouacs' campaign, which presented the philosophes as a group of irritating barbarians.¹⁵ The Jansenists also threw in their tuppence-worth: the strongest critiques came from one Abraham Chaumeix,¹⁶ who took it upon himself to defend religion from the *Encyclopédie*, first in his *Préjugés*

11 *Petites lettres sur les grands philosophes*, in *Œuvres*, II, pp. 99–151. On the plagiarism row see Pierre Frantz, 'Un hôte mal attendu: Goldoni, Diderot, Voltaire', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 177 (1993), 55–66.

12 Robert-François Damiens (1715–1757) was the last person to be executed in France by drawing and quartering, the traditional punishment for regicide. On this attack and its consequences, see Pierre Rétat, ed., *L'Attentat de Damiens. Discours sur l'événement au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, Lyons).

13 Joseph Giry Saint-Cyr (1699–1761), clergyman.

14 Jacob-Nicolas Moreau (1717–1803), lawyer, journalist, and historian.

15 The first 'Mémoire sur les Cacouacs' appeared in the journal the *Mercure de France* in October 1757; Moreau took up the campaign again with a 'Nouveau mémoire pour servir à l'histoire des Cacouacs', and in the following year Giry de Saint-Cyr published a 'Catéchisme et décisions des cas de conscience à l'usage des Cacouacs'. See edition by Gehradt Stenger, *L'Affaire des Cacouacs: trois pamphlets contre les philosophes des Lumières* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Sainte-Étienne, 2004).

16 Abraham-Joseph de Chaumeix (1725–1773), critic.

légitimes, published in 1758–1759, and later, with d'Acquin,¹⁷ in a journal entitled the *Censeur hebdomadaire*. Chaumeix's efforts, moreover, were abetted by members of the Paris Parliament, especially the lawyer general Joly de Fleury.¹⁸ Following the parliamentary arrêt (judgement) of 6 February 1759 that censured Helvetius's *De l'esprit*,¹⁹ this many-fronted attack came to head with the publication of a new arrêt against the *Encyclopédie* from the State Council of the King. An earlier arrêt, on 7 February 1752, had officially suppressed the first two volumes, though without much noticeable effect on the enterprise as a whole; this latest document revoked the publication privilege entirely:

*His Majesty has been informed that the authors of the said work, taking advantage of the indulgence they have thus far received, have produced five new volumes, which are no less scandalous than the preceding ones, and which have already raised the ire of the public ministers of the parliament. His Majesty has therefore judged, based on these repeated abuses, that it is no longer possible to let the said privilege continue; that the advantages to be gained from a work of this nature for the progress of the sciences and the arts can never outweigh the irreparable damage it does to morals and to religion.*²⁰

The philosophes therefore seemed to be in a difficult position, marked symbolically by the retirement of d'Alembert from the encyclopaedic enterprise.²¹ At the start of the following year, the quarrel was taken up once again, this time at the Académie Française. Following the death of Maupertuis,²² his vacant seat was taken up on 10 March 1760 by Jean-Jacques Lefranc de Pompignan,²³ whose inaugural speech was a diatribe against the philosophes:

If it were true that in the century in which we live, in this century drunk on the spirit of philosophy and on the love of the arts, the abuse of talents, a scorn for

17 Pierre-Louis D' Aquin De Chateau-Lyon (1720–1796), author of the *Siècle littéraire de Louis XV* (1754).

18 Joseph Omer Joly de Fleury (1715–1810).

19 Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771), whose *De l'esprit* was published in 1758 — translated into English as *Essays on the Mind* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000). On the quarrel around the 1758 publication of *De l'esprit*, see David Warner Smith, *Helvétius: A Study in Persecution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

20 Arrêt of the State Council of the King, 8 March 1759, p. 1.

21 On the effects of the revocation of the *Encyclopédie* privilege, see Jacques Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie* (Paris: Armand-Colin, 1962), pp. 78–79.

22 Pierre Louis Maupertuis (1698–1759), mathematician and eventual director of the Académie de Sciences.

23 Jean-Jacques Lefranc, Marquis de Pompignon (1709–1784), author of theatre, poetry, polemics and treatises, among other texts.

*religion, and a hatred of authority were truly the dominant characteristics of our productions, let us not be mistaken, my good sirs, that posterity, that impartial judge of all the centuries, would pronounce its sovereign judgement that we had produced nothing but a false literature and a vain philosophy.*²⁴

Having conducted a brief review of the ‘immense number’ of ‘scandalous pamphlets’, of ‘insolent verses’, of ‘frivolous and licentious writings’, and of philosophical and historical texts, Pompignan concluded that ‘all [...] in these books, which are multiplying to infinitude, [carried] the imprint of a depraved literature, of a corrupt morals, of a haughty philosophy, which undermine[d] both the throne and the altar’. This fearless outburst earned the new academician a barrage of criticism: Voltaire set the tone by writing *Les Quand*, which was quickly followed by a whole host of ‘monosyllables’ in prose and verse, which attacked the impudent Pompignan.²⁵

The Birth of the Play

The ensuing fracas had still not quietened when, just before Easter 1760, Palissot sent *Les Philosophes* to the actors of the Comédie-Française. The play rehashed the key accusations made in the earlier texts, presenting the philosophes as an exploitative cabal who advocated adherence to their philosophical way of life out of pure self-advancement; a grouping that was quarrelsome and divided until it came to defending the character or works of any one of its number, and that preferred vague ideas of loving ‘humanity’ over its own kin and countrymen.²⁶ The plot owes much to Molière’s *Les Femmes savantes* in particular.²⁷ A group of self-styled ‘philosophes’ (Dortidius, Théophraste, Valère, and their associate and valet-in-disguise, M. Carondas) inveigle their way into the

24 J.-J. Lefranc de Pompignan, *Discours de reception à l’Académie française*, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-et-reponse-de-pierre-cureau-de-la-chambre-0>

25 *Les Quand* and the other texts based around the repetition of an opening monosyllable are referenced in pamphlets that appear later, in response to Palissot’s play, namely: *Petites Réflexions* (Ferret, pp. 153–57 (p. 155)) and *Les Philosophes de bois* (Ferret, pp. 246–60 (p. 25)).

26 Delafarge examines how certain lines are almost direct translations into verse of the prose of Palissot’s earlier *Le Cercle*, pp. 140–41.

27 In Molière’s play, Philaminte is taken in by Trissotin, a false *bel esprit* who persuades her to promise him marriage to her daughter Henriette, all the while only being after her money. His trickery is revealed, as in *Les Philosophes*, through a letter.

household of the rich widow Cydalise, whom they flatter into believing she is a philosophical genius so that she will allow her only daughter, Rosalie, to marry Valère. Rosalie and her lover Damis, along with their servants Marton and Crispin, expose the philosophes for the frauds that they are, and the play ends with reconciliation between mother and daughter, and love matches between both the two young people and the two servants.

This condemnation of the authors of the *Encyclopédie* was therefore the culmination of a campaign that had been waged for three years; a campaign through which its two constituent camps — philosophes and anti-philosophes — were brought into being.²⁸ Indeed, in his account of the quarrel in his 1762 *Querelles littéraires*, the Abbé Iraitlh noted: 'Of all the means employed to make a society of writers [the *encyclopédistes*] appear hateful, the most violent was the comedy *Les Philosophes*'.²⁹ Crucially, its attack took place on the stage of the Comédie-Française, rather than in semi-clandestine pamphlets, publicly cementing this distinction between the two groups. Moreover, the political context made it dangerous to call into question the philosophes' respect for the government. Since 1756, France had been engaged in the Seven Years War, and was by this stage in a delicate position following a number of English victories.³⁰ Passions were running high and, as Grimm³¹ highlighted, 'there is no man in power today who does not regard the progress of philosophy amongst us as the source of all our evils and as the cause of most of the problems France has suffered in recent years.'

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- 28 According to d'Aquin, this 'civil war' dated back to 'the strong and insistent speech made by the celebrated M. de Pompignan, in which he so eloquently defended the faith of his fathers and the throne of his masters', but also to 'certain articles published in the *Journal de Trévoux*' (*Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, 5 vols (Utrecht: Dufour, 1760–1795), vol. 3, p. 28). The articles in question were published in January and February 1751 by P. Berthier, following the publication of the prospectus of the *Encyclopédie*, and Diderot responded to them in his *Lettres au R.P. Berthier, Jésuite* (1751).
- 29 [Augustin Simon Iraitlh], *Querelles littéraires, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire des révolutions de la République des Lettres, depuis Homère jusqu'à nos jours*, 4 vols (Paris: chez Durand, 1761), IV, p. 151.
- 30 The Seven Years' War took place between 1756 and 1763, with the element of the conflict involving England and France largely arising from colonial disputes relating to North America.
- 31 Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, contributor to the *Encyclopédie* and editor of the *Correspondance littéraire*, from 1753.

One would think that the reasons that caused us to lose the battles of Rosbach and Minden, and which caused the destruction and the loss of our fleets, are fairly clearly evident. But if you consult the general feeling of the Court, you will be told that it is new philosophy that must be blamed for these problems; and that, moreover, it is this philosophy that has extinguished military spirit, blind submission, and all that which formerly produced great men and glorious actions in France.

The impact of the performance of Palissot's play seemed, even at the time, to be indissociable from these political considerations:

It is of little importance that Palissot has written a bad comedy, attacking people who are to be respected for both their morals and their talents. But the fact that this farce has been performed in the theatre of Corneille, on the authority of the government; that the police — who, in this country, usually pursue satirical works with a relentless severity — have set aside their principles, and let several citizens be insulted by an atrocious satire: all that is very significant, and illustrates — quite aside from an overturning of all order and all justice — the type of favour and protection that literature and philosophy can henceforward expect from the government.³²

Soon after the first performance of Les Philosophes, Collé, who could not be accused of any particular partiality towards the encyclopédistes, also noted in his Journal that 'this play will go down in history': 'it is the most bitter, bloody, cruel satire that has ever been authorised'.³³

The circumstances of the play's reception by the actors of the French troupe suggest that though it was not strictly a command piece, at the very least there were orders from high up that it should be performed. Any new play had to be accepted by a secret vote of the company members, all of whom were shareholders in the theatre.³⁴ According to Collé, 'it was Fréron who

32 *Correspondance littéraire*, 16 vols (Paris: Prault, 1753–1790), IV, pp. 241 (available at <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/grimms-correspondance-litt%C3%A9raire>).

33 Charles Collé (1709–1783), dramatist. Indeed, in March 1757 he writes in his journal: 'The *Encyclopédistes* are men whose knowledge is broad; they have wit, method, sound judgment — as long as passion does not enter into things — a good style, even warmth at times, but they do not have that which we call 'genius'; in short, they have invented nothing, they have an unfounded pride, and yet they want to effect a domination and tyranny that will never be accepted in the Republic of Letters, in which no citizen will accept a master.' (*Journal et mémoires de Charles Collé*, 3 vols (Paris: Didot Frères, 1868), II, pp. 166–67).

34 The Register of the Comédie-Française simply states, on 22 March 1760, that Palissot's play 'was received according to the rules of the ballot to be performed at

presented and read this play to the troupe, with an audacity that in a less polite century would have been described as impudence. [...] He told them that he was bringing them a play, and that it would be useless to deliberate over its reception, since it would be performed in any case in spite of them'. Collé goes on to note that 'however contemptible Fréron may be, he would never have been so confident without the certainty that he would be backed up: he had authority behind him'.³⁵ Palissot's play was accepted in the absence of first actress Clairon, who did not hesitate, on her return, to upbraid her colleagues for failing prey to such a villain.³⁶ We might nonetheless wonder, with Collé, that 'the protection accorded to this play', whilst 'very powerful', 'did not dare to declare itself', and instead 'remained hidden':

Before the performance, the story went that the play was being performed by order of the Dauphin. Today, the prince said expressly, in public, that he did not know the play; that he had not read it. The Duc de Choiseul, who was equally accused of favouring Palissot, also denied it, as if it were a villainous act: both men are distancing themselves from this shameful protection.³⁷

However, to question this secrecy would be to forget that it would have been somewhat paradoxical for the Dauphin, whose piety was well known, to declare himself the protector (and by implication the commissioner) of a play, given the immoral light in which the theatre was viewed in the period.³⁸ As for the Duc de Choiseul, his attitude seems to have been born out of political opportunism: though he wrote to Voltaire on 16 June 1760 that he was 'abandoning [Palissot] to the damnation of philosophy and the philosophes, and perhaps even to the whipping that he deserves', he also noted that 'this series of authorial spats' had nonetheless ultimately been 'useful in

the opening of the new season' (cited by Delafarge, p. 121).

35 *Journal*, II, pp. 350–52.

36 Clair Joséphe Hippolyte Leris, known as La Clairon (1723–1803), Comédie-Française leading actress. On her reaction, as well as other details relating to the performance of the play, see Delafarge, esp. pp. 121–69.

37 *Journal*, II, pp. 352–53.

38 See Abbé Proyard's comments on this point: not content with himself refuting the works of the philosophes, 'enemies of God and the State', and with encouraging 'people in power to use all the weapons of the law against them', the Dauphin 'set against them', in the person of Fréron, 'the most inconvenient enemy they could have wished for in this century, who at every encounter encouraged them to expose the poison within their writings' (*Vie du Dauphin* (Paris: Berton, 1777), pp. 56–59).

serving as a diversion for the Parisian rabble from the real war'; that is, the one happening on the sea, against the English.³⁹

Performance and Reception

*Palissot's play was a real success, attested by both the enemies and the supporters of the philosophes: its first performance on 2 May 1760 drew 1439 spectators, and the main actor had to quieten the crowd before the play could begin. Fréron wrote that 'since the foundation of the theatre we have not seen [...] such great crowds of people. [...] It was a crush, a crowd, a madness like none I have ever known. The works of Corneille, Racine, Molière, Crébillon and Voltaire never drew such attention nor attracted so many spectators nor created so many cabales.'*⁴⁰ *D'Acquin said that 'the people laid siege, so to speak, to the doors of the Comédie-Française' and that this play 'excited a curiosity and interest of a level that had never been witnessed, even for the most celebrated dramas'.*⁴¹ *Grimm, meanwhile, stated that 'if the news of a military victory had arrived on the day of the first performance of Les Philosophes, it would have been a loss for the glory of [Lieutenant General] M. de Broglie,*⁴² *for no one would have spoken of it'.*⁴³

*This is where any consensus breaks down, however. The tone of the reviews that appeared in the periodical press, as well as the first-hand descriptions given in private correspondence, reflect the polarised positions set out in the surrounding pamphlets. D'Acquin celebrated in Palissot 'a comic poet', who could not be ignored by his contemporaries, 'in the context of the growth of irreligion, independence, pride, pomp, betrayal, the confusion of estates, a criminal neglect of those of great talent and a foolish enthusiasm for those of little talent, a general upheaval in the sciences and the arts, which has resulted in certain people gaining an incomprehensible reputation; since, essentially, all manner of other idiocies have reached their peak.'*⁴⁴ *Grimm, on the other*

39 D8983. All letters from/to Voltaire are cited using Besterman's numbering system, which is also searchable in <https://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>. On the Duc de Choiseul, see in particular Renée Pomeau and Christiane Mervaud, eds, *De la Cour au jardin, 1750–1759* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), p. 369.

40 Elie Cathérine Fréron, *L'Année littéraire, ou, suite des lettres sur quelques écrits de ce temps*, 202 vols (Paris: Lambert, 1754–1790), 1760, III, p. 214.

41 *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, II, p. 368.

42 Charles-François de Broglie, Marquis de Ruffec (1719–1781), Lieutenant General.

43 *Correspondance littéraire*, IV, p. 368.

44 *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, II, pp. 381–82.

hand, observed that 'any piquancy to be found in *Les Philosophes* consists in saying that fraud and philosophe are synonyms; in attacking the morals of M. Diderot, M. Helvétius and others; in representing them on stage as criminals and bad citizens, and in making Jean-Jacques Rousseau walk on all fours.' And in sarcastic conclusion: 'however pitiful this play may be in itself, it will go down in history in France, and will prove the truth in the assertion that the most extraordinary events often stem from the most derisory causes.'⁴⁵

Collé expressed the view of the middle ground. 'Palissot's play', he wrote, 'makes a strong impression on most people who go to see it.'

*All the good fathers in the audience applaud it in good faith, and the honest men of the cloth, who attack the government for allowing decent citizens to be portrayed on stage, have nonetheless no compunction in watching the sword of satire fall upon people whose principles — or rather, whose opinions — threaten to turn everything on its head; many people who, without being pious, are still believers, and whom the encyclopédistes, in their works, have confused with idiots for this sole reason, believe themselves avenged by the success of this play. The lower classes add further weight to this side of the argument, and think that they are defending the cause of virtue by attacking the new style of philosophy; they do not realise that the pleasure that they find in seeing it criticised is nothing but a malignant pleasure that they are made to experience in a mechanical fashion; they do not foresee the cruel consequences, for themselves, of making it normal and acceptable to allow the mockery of good citizens.'*⁴⁶

This sketched sociological analysis of the play's reception provides a counterpoint to the views presented by later pamphlets, which often have recourse to pre-existing prejudices.

Critical assessments of the play were most often based on a comparison with the comedies of Molière, an omnipresent reference in the quarrel for Palissot's supporters as much as for his detractors. The Abbé de la Porte,⁴⁷ for example, having examined the play, could not help commenting on the 'resemblance' of the plot of *Les Philosophes* to those of *Tartuffe* (1664) and *Les Femmes savantes* (1672). Extending his references to take in Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, Gresset, and Destouches, he added that 'the outline of *Les Philosophes*' is 'very similar to those of *Le Flatteur*, *Le Méchant*, *L'Ingrat*, and generally

⁴⁵ Correspondance littéraire, IV, pp. 240–41.

⁴⁶ Journal, II, pp. 357–58.

⁴⁷ Joseph de La Porte (1714–1779), priest and homme de lettres, who worked with Fréron on the *Année littéraire*.

all character comedies'.⁴⁸ However, he dismissed the charge of plagiarism that had been put forward by Palissot's enemies, instead evoking the standard characteristics, plots and situations of all such character comedies.⁴⁹ Collé, for his part, remarked that 'there is no action, except in the third act [...] everything happens in conversation, but the characters of the philosophes are quite well captured. [...] It must be admitted that they are drawn from nature, albeit with the darkest cunning'.⁵⁰

For though no-one denied that Palissot wrote with a certain amount of wit and style,⁵¹ the key question, bitterly debated throughout the quarrel, was whether or not he had crossed a line between a form of comedy expected to paint its characters 'from nature', and the portrayal of real people, based on easily identifiable original models. On 8 May 1760, Favart wrote that Palissot, by putting on stage 'Diderot, d'Alembert, Rousseau, and all the authors of the *Encyclopédie*', and by ensuring that he not only 'covered them in ridicule' but also 'made them hateful', 'had renewed in this respect the liberties taken by ancient Greek comedy': 'the century of Aristophanes begins again', he confirmed on 24 June. Echoing 'most of the discussions among the audience by people who pride themselves on their impartiality', Favart related this 'licentiousness' to the clear intention of the author:

If he claims to remedy the abuses of philosophy, then he is to be praised for it; but this is not what we can understand from his work; he could have taken a different road; he could have made his critique more general in order to make it more useful; the arrows that he launches, which fall with great accuracy upon the people that he wishes to portray, are clearly only fired in order to serve his personal animosity, for which the principles are obscure, but the ends are clear. [...] All critics agree that if Mr P** had avoided personalities, and had instead contented himself with an attack on what threatens morality in the works of the encyclopédistes, [...] he would have produced a worthy piece.⁵²

48 Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, *Le Flatteur* (1696), Jean-Baptiste Gresset, *Le Méchant* (1747) and Néricault Destouches, *L'Ingrat* (1712). According to the author of a review in the *Journal encycopédique*, the plot of *Les Philosophes* is 'stolen from the *Méchant*' (1760, III, p. 129).

49 *L'Observateur littéraire*, 18 vols (Paris: Duchesne/Lambert, 1758–1761), III (1760), pp. 120–21 and 132.

50 *Journal*, II, p. 359.

51 The Count de Durazzo writes to Favart, for example, on 14 June 1760, that though *Les Philosophes* had appeared to him to be 'without invention or interest', it was nonetheless 'written with spirit, and in a good style' (Favart, *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires, dramatiques et anecdotiques de C. S. Favart*, 3 vols (Paris: Léopold Colin, 1808), I, p. 43). Similarly, Voltaire writes to Palissot on 4 June, 'I consider your play well written' (D8958).

52 *Mémoires*, I, pp. 29, 53 and 37.

Alongside the reference to 'ancient Greek comedy', especially Aristophanes, which was also found in many of the polemical texts, the play was also reproached for itself being nothing but a defamatory pamphlet. Collé hypothesised that Palissot in fact only wrote what he described explicitly as a 'pamphlet', 'intending to have it printed privately'.⁵³ In this debate, discussion essentially centred around the presence (universally recognised, even by Palissot's supporters) of personal attacks that directly targeted the philosophes. D'Acquin did not deny that 'Palissot, carried away, no doubt, by the fire of composition, or perhaps irritated by particular ideas, allowed certain details into his play that are too identifiable, and mean his characters become personalities'.⁵⁴ Fréron wrote, in a similar vein, that 'most spectators were shocked — and with reason — at the personalities that the author let himself portray, especially at the first performance'.⁵⁵ But both journalists added, too, that Palissot modified these 'personalities' at the second performance. Favart was in agreement, though showed his loyalties to the philosophes' camp when he suggested that 'to cut out [these attacks] entirely he would have had to cut the whole play'.⁵⁶

It is important to understand what precisely is meant by this term 'personalities', and examine the exact nature of those that remain in the printed text. Fréron recognised that 'the scene of the bookseller is another one of those satires by the author of the Philosophes that could not be ignored': 'he names works, and to name works is to name their authors'.⁵⁷ But he also added, in Palissot's defence, that 'people use the term 'personalities' for portrayals that are nothing of the sort'. Reporting to Voltaire on the first performance of *Les Philosophes*, d'Alembert wrote on 6 May 1760: 'Neither of us is attacked personally; the only people mistreated in this way are Helvétius, Diderot, Rousseau, Duclos, Mme Geoffrin, and Mlle Clairon, who complained about this infamy'.⁵⁸ Reading the play, we find that though Clairon and Grimm are the target of isolated jibes,⁵⁹ Diderot is clearly Palissot's main target: the name of the character Dortidius is an anagram of his name, extended by the Latin suffix ('-ius') used by Molière to mock his pedants, whilst the name of the young female lead, Rosalie, is taken directly from *Le Fils naturel*. Diderot is also

53 *Journal*, II, p. 351.

54 *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, II, p. 369.

55 *L'Année littéraire*, 1760, III, pp. 217–18.

56 *Mémoires*, I, p. 47.

57 *L'Année littéraire*, 1760, III, p. 221. The journalist is referring to III, vi.

58 D8894.

59 Clairon is implied by the reference to the supportive actors that the philosophes, on the point of being represented on stage, will have on their side (III, iv), whilst in III, vi, M. Prope mentions Grimm's pamphlet, *Le Petit Prophète de Boehmischbroda*.

easily recognisable, following Fréron's own criteria, in the direct references to his works (not just the play *Le Fils naturel* and its accompanying *Entretiens* (1757), but also the materialist *Les Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (1754), the libertine *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), *La Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751), which dealt with language, knowledge acquisition and aesthetics, and his second play, *Le Père de famille* (1758)).⁶⁰ Rousseau is identifiable for the same reason, in the reference to his prize-winning 1754 *Discours sur l'inégalité*, and he is also indirectly represented by the character of Crispin, who claims to be his disciple.⁶¹ Duclos is present in the quotation from his *Considérations sur les mœurs* (1751), which is referenced in a note; Delafarge even suggests that he is personally represented by the character of Théophraste.⁶² Though he is not necessarily directly identifiable in *Valère*, Helvétius is equally the target of numerous attacks, especially in the theft scene (II, i), which puts into action the theory of personal interest set out in *De l'esprit*.⁶³ It is difficult to agree with Collé in his discussion of 'the woman, who represents Helvétius',⁶⁴ not least because according to Hennin, 'the old Dumesnil', who played the role of Cydalise, 'managed to dress and make herself up exactly like Mme Geoffrin, which caused those who knew the woman to laugh a great deal'.⁶⁵ This apparent identification is nonetheless confused by Favart's claim that Palissot 'would not admit to having had the least intention of depicting Mme Geoffrin', but rather 'admitted, so I've heard, that he drew

60 Respectively in II, iii; III, iv; II, iii and (for the latter three) III, vi. Delafarge also argues that the character traits Dortidius is said to possess resemble Diderot himself, however this seems to be based on very little direct evidence (pp. 151–52), and Barling suggests the description is nothing like him (p. 75).

61 The mention of the *Discours* is found in III, vi; Crispin's presentation of a paradoxical philosopher appears in II, vi. Before the performance, rumours were already spreading that Rousseau himself was going to be attacked: Voltaire wrote to Mme d'Épinay on April 25 that 'Préville will play Rousseau, walking on four legs.' (D8874).

62 Charlos Duclos (1704–1772). See II, iii and Delafarge, pp. 157–58.

63 II, i. See Delafarge, pp. 158–60 on the possible identification between Helvétius and Valère: he claims that Palissot distinguishes the man (known for his generosity) from the author (exponent of the doctrine of self-interest).

64 *Journal*, II, p. 359.

65 Pierre Michel Hennin (1728–1807), diplomat and author: letter to his son of 17 May 1760, quoted in the *Correspondance générale* of Helvétius, 15 vols (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1984–), II, p. 277, n. 3. A letter from the abbé Trublet to Formey, written between 28 May and 2 June (D8944) confirms that 'from the second performance [...] certain controversial areas were cut, including a line that made too obvious reference to Mme Geoffrin, a rich society woman, with close links to the philosophes and other writers.'

*the main features of Cydalise from the Countess de la Marck*⁶⁶ — who was, of course, his former patron.

The first editions of the text began circulating on 19 May. There were multiple different editions that year, with several slight variations. A key area of difference is in Act III, where early editions have no scene v, and in some cases include two scenes vi. T.J. Barling, in his 1975 edition (from which Ferret takes much of his information on textual variants), hypothesises that the scene v introduced from the 1777 edition of the play (included in our edition) was in fact a scene that had been cut by censors from the original version: certainly, its presentation of Doritidius/Diderot as rejoicing in the illness of an acquaintance ‘whose dissection I’d have carried out’ seems merely gratuitous in plot terms, and calculated purely to discredit the protagonist.⁶⁷ The total run of the play, comprising fourteen performances, was seen by 12,839 people, including individuals who might traditionally have stayed away from the theatre, such as the clergy.⁶⁸ *This well-attested success is perhaps less due to any intrinsic aesthetic qualities than to the aura of scandal that surrounded it, whatever the censors may have suppressed.*

The Pamphlet Quarrel

Further proof of this scandal is the scale of the controversy set off by the performance of what Barbier termed ‘a partisan play’,⁶⁹ testified by the production in just a few months of the twenty or so texts published in Ferret’s edition. In July 1760 Collé wrote: ‘The whole of Paris has, these past weeks, been occupied with nothing but the quarrel between the encyclopédistes and their enemies; we have seen nothing but pamphlets and printed insults.’⁷⁰ In May, Favart was already able to note that ‘these days, Paris is only concerned with literary quarrels. [...] I do not know if literature is gaining anything, but it is

66 *Mémoires*, I, p. 7. According to English Showalter, it makes more sense to see Françoise de Graffigny (1695–1758; novelist and salon hostess) behind the character of Cydalise: see ‘Madame a fait un livre: Madame de Graffigny, Palissot et *Les Philosophes*’, in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l’Encyclopédie*, 23 (1997), 109–25.

67 Barling, p. xxvii.

68 Henry Lancaster, *The Comédie-Française (1701–1774)* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1952), p. 797.

69 Edmond Barbier, *Journal historique et anecdotique du regne de Louis XV*, 4 vols (J. Renouard et cie, 1847–56), IV, p. 347.

70 *Journal*, II, p. 367.

certain that the authors of the pamphlets and the printers of the periodical press are profiting'.⁷¹

The quarrel texts — comedies, plays in verse, and pamphlets taking on a whole variety of forms, from letters and fictional confessions, to pastiches of biblical 'visions', and texts whose stylistic unity is based on the recurrence of a single monosyllable — ranged from those printed with full *privilège* (the permission to publish accorded by the crown) or performed on the public stage, to those published or circulated illegally. In between was a whole ambiguous set of works printed with 'tacit permission' or 'a sort of permission'. The responses of the philosophes' supporters to Palissot's play display a relatively unified set of satirical strategies that were already visible in the play itself. The writers take their places in a pre-existing camp, and each camp defines its opponents in relation to itself, the responses creating and perpetuating a 'myth' of Palissot to rival his own 'myth' of the self-interested, grasping philosophes. Repeated accusations act both as slogans to identify a writer's allegiance, amusing his allies through knowing references, and as rallying cries, inviting the support of the public for his cause.

In order to ridicule him effectively, Palissot's opponents have to read his work as if he were not himself writing satirically. They have to take his misrepresentation of their ideas seriously, as if he really did believe Rousseau wanted to walk on all fours and eat leaves. He is thus, across the texts, accused of stupidity, jealousy, plagiarism, poor taste, and immorality. The theme of self-interest in particular, so key to Palissot's attacks, is turned back on him, with several pamphlets implying that he had bought the applause of the audience; an implicit reference to the well-known support Fréron had given the play, both in person at the Comédie-Française and in his *Année littéraire*.⁷² A further repeated attack — which, like the reference to Fréron, implied inside knowledge on the part of the pamphlets' audience — is the suggestion that the playwright 'prostituted his wife in Nancy and Paris'⁷³ an accusation that recalls Madame de Graffigny's mention in her private writing of 'more

⁷¹ *Mémoires*, I, p. 29.

⁷² There was truth in the accusation, since a decade later Fréron was to admit, 'It was I who made his little literary reputation; I who had the play *Les Philosophes* received [by the troupe]; I, I admit, who had it applauded.' Fréron to Jacob Vernes, 20 October 1771, cited in Jean Balcou, *Fréron contre les philosophes* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), p. 195.

⁷³ *Les Quand*, in Ferret, pp. 101–06.

stories about him than would be necessary to dishonour five or six men'.⁷⁴ These texts, written in the heat of the quarrel, are naturally ephemeral and occasional in character, and are marked, too, by dramatically varying literary quality.

The literary interest of these quarrel texts lies mostly in their (more or less effective) use of rhetoric, whose success is measured in terms of its action on the reader. It should be remembered, indeed, that these texts were aimed at a public that — as contemporary accounts testify — was easily bored. D'Acquin highlighted, for example, at the end of his review of Poinsinet's *Petit philosophe*, that 'the public is fed up with poetry, plays, pamphlets for and against'. Addressing the combatants in both camps, he proclaimed: 'you are already making them yawn, so just keep on if you want to make them fall asleep entirely'.⁷⁵ This point doubtless explains the inventiveness — or, at least, the formal diversity — of the most popular texts. The potential for the audience to lose interest explains, too, the importance of laughter, which acts powerfully both to ridicule one's enemies, and to create a bond between the members of a particular faction.

Voltaire and Palissot

A particularly complex element of the *Philosophes* quarrel is the role of Voltaire. In the prefatory letter to the first edition (included below) — which had held up the publication of the play in a censorship battle, and was, according to Favart, 'more insulting than the text itself'⁷⁶ — Palissot explicitly stated that two philosophers were exempt from his criticism: Montesquieu, who had died in 1755, and Voltaire, 'that rare genius of whom I have only ever spoken with delight, who received me with such kindness in his home'.⁷⁷ Palissot sent this first edition to Voltaire himself, having visited the writer in Geneva five years earlier. In the ensuing correspondence, the older man attempted to persuade the author of *Les Philosophes* to publish a retraction, or at the very least an acknowledgement that the citations from the works he critiqued in his preface were at best out of context, and at worst incorrect.

⁷⁴ 11 June 1751, cited by Showalter in 'Madame a fait un livre'.

⁷⁵ *Le Censeur hebdomadaire*, 1760, III, p. 312.

⁷⁶ *Mémoires*, I, p. 47.

⁷⁷ See translation of the preface, below.

Palissot refused, and tried to apportion the blame elsewhere.⁷⁸ In July 1760, when the correspondence ended, Palissot published the letters, putting Voltaire in a delicate position: not only had Palissot singled him out for praise, but there was now printed evidence of Voltaire's reasonable responses, which could be viewed by the other philosophes as acceptance of such obsequious flattery.⁷⁹

Though in his private correspondence Voltaire had nonetheless continued to stress his solidarity with Diderot and the others whom Palissot had attacked, the publication of the letters pushed him into more direct, public action. First, in July 1760, he allowed his play, *L'Écossaise*, to be performed at the Comédie-Française.⁸⁰ This piece had been circulating in printed form since May, claiming to be the translation of a piece by the brother of the English philosopher David Hume. A story of reunited long-lost families, its villain is a hack journalist named 'Fréron' — an even more thinly-veiled reference to Palissot's friend and supporter Fréron than Palissot's original Dortidius/Diderot creation. Voltaire's access to the public, royally-sanctioned stage of the Comédie-Française (where his bust would twice be crowned with laurels) marked him out among the philosophes, and the performance of the play constituted a very public pinning of his colours to the philosophes' mast.

His second riposte was in print. In September 1760 an anonymous *Recueil de facéties parisiennes* appeared. The volume, containing texts by Morellet, Elie de Beaumont and La Condamine, had been put together by Voltaire, who also contributed a number of his own texts whilst stringently denying any involvement in the enterprise on several occasions, as was his wont.⁸¹ The *Receuil* was comprised predominantly of texts relating to the quarrel around Lefranc de Pompignan's admission to the Académie Française, and to the linked quarrel around *Les Philosophes*. Particularly relevant to the latter were an edited, footnoted version of the letters

78 See *Lettres et réponses de Monsieur Palissot et de Monsieur de Voltaire, avec quelques notes sur la dernière lettre de Monsieur Palissot, etc.*, ed. by Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, in *Recueil de facéties parisiennes*, OCV, 51a (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), pp. 245–340.

79 See Voltaire's letter to d'Argental on 4 June, in which he states 'je dois craindre qu'on ne me reproche d'être complice de la comédie des *Philosophes*' (D8959).

80 *L'Écossaise*, in *Works*, 1760, OCV, 50 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1986). On the place of the play in the polemic, see Logan Connors, *Dramatic Battles in Eighteenth-century France: Philosophes, Anti-Philosophes and Polemical Theatre* (Oxford: SVEC, 2012), pp. 113–216.

81 *Receuil*, pp. xix–xxv.

between Palissot and Voltaire, and a re-publication of the very preface that had originally sparked the latter's irritation, with its own preface.⁸² The preface to the preface repeats many of the critiques already familiar from the other quarrel texts: Voltaire questions Palissot's own literary abilities, and suggests he is motivated by greed and jealous self-interest rather than any high-minded morality. The footnotes systematically refute the claims made about the philosophes' own works. Particularly notable are a sequence that repeats, again and again, 'you lie',⁸³ and the several notes in which Voltaire takes up the question of definition and factional delimitation that we have already noted as key to the quarrel more broadly. Many of those Palissot attacks, he claims, are not the *encyclopédistes* with whom Voltaire identifies himself, and should not therefore be lumped together in one group.⁸⁴

Diderot's Reply?

Voltaire's *Recueil des facéties* referred explicitly to the occasional nature of the texts produced around *Les Philosophes*; including, perhaps, the play itself. They were, said Voltaire, trifles, destined to be forgotten, and published purely for the amusement of the contemporary reader.⁸⁵ However, *beyond the recurring attacks and defences, and the large helping of bad faith that necessarily shaped their creations, in this quarrel these authors also addressed bigger questions; in particular, that of the line between comedy and personal satire in the theatre. For modern readers, they raise further questions still; notably, the extent to which a Comédie-Française success can or should be reduced to a mere 'occasional' piece — and conversely, how far texts that tradition has set up as 'literary masterpieces' may in fact have an 'occasional' dimension.*

Key to the latter point is Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*. This complex novel-satire-dialogue has presented an endless puzzle to both readers and critics since its posthumous publication in 1805.⁸⁶ At times, Diderot's

82 *Lettre du Sieur Palissot, auteur de la comédie des 'Philosophes', au public, pour servir de préface à la pièce*, ed. by Jessica Goodman, in *Recueil*, pp. 221–44.

83 *Lettre*, pp. 240–41.

84 *Lettre*, p. 229.

85 'Préface' to the *Facéties*, ed. by Diana Guiragossian-Carr, in *Recueil*, pp. 341–50.

86 The text was initially published in German translation by Goethe, then translated back into French and published in 1821 by de Saur and Saint-Geniès. The first

own core beliefs in the value of encyclopaedic knowledge and education are called into question, whilst despite the apparent adoption of position indicated by the presence of a character called 'Moi/Me' interrogating a third-person 'Lui/Him', neither of the two characters can be said consistently to ventriloquise the author's voice; each being privileged or criticised in turn. Two centuries of critics have attempted to 'solve' this puzzle, trying to integrate the apparently disparate aspects of the text's philosophy, but far from reaching a consensus, each new analysis has only added to the complexity by demonstrating the strength of evidence for each new theory.⁸⁷

Yet the text's very first critic, Goethe, identified its main focus as a very simple one: namely, to ridicule the anti-philosophes who had made such mercilessly personal attacks on Diderot over the *Encyclopédie*; in particular, Palissot. In his 1805 German translation, the first edition of the work to be published, the explanatory notes for the reader include entries on Palissot and *Les Philosophes*, which Goethe had watched as a child.⁸⁸ Goethe devotes lengthy discussion to the position of Diderot's text in the quarrel we have thus far outlined. Diderot, Goethe wrote, 'uses all the powers of his mind to depict the flatterers and parasites in the full extent of their depravity, in no way sparing their patrons. At the same time the author is concerned to classify his literary enemies as precisely the same kind of hypocrites and flatterers'.⁸⁹

Though to read *Le Neveu* as nothing but personal satire is severely reductive, it is nonetheless revealing to consider why Goethe was so convinced in this statement. The personal element of Diderot's text is easily discernable: Palissot's name appears twenty-three times in the text, as one of the group of parasites that fawn over a banker and his actress wife, with whom the eponymous Neveu (Lui/Him) is associated. These

published version based on the French manuscript was the 1823 Brière edition. See *Rameau's Nephew / Le Neveu de Rameau. A Multi-Media Bilingual Edition*, ed. by Marian Hobson, trans. by Kate E. Tunstall and Caroline Warman, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), <http://www.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0098>

87 See amongst others Jean Starobinski, 'Diogène dans Le Neveu de Rameau', *Stanford French Review*, 8.8 (1984), 147–65, and Donal O'Gorman, *Diderot the Satirist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

88 See James Schmidt, 'The Fool's Truth: Diderot, Goethe, and Hegel', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57.4 (1996), esp. 625–28.

89 Goethe's notes to his translation of *Rameaus Neffe*, in *Goethes Werke*, XXV, cited in translation by Schmidt in 'The Fool's Truth', p. 628.

are self-interested, mediocre men who live only from the exploitation of others, and who, significantly, are characterised as spending their lives in petty disputes, forming and breaking alliances, each with his own view of what is right or wrong. In a ranking of the most 'sublime' wrongdoers of the age, Palissot is placed a respectable second.⁹⁰

To a certain degree Lui also directly represents both Palissot as an individual, and the whole anti-philosophes camp. Many of the accusations made of Palissot elsewhere in the quarrel pamphlets find parallels in Lui's character. Most strikingly, our lasting image of Lui is of his tears at the end of *Le Neveu* over the death of his 'dear other half', from whom he drew such lucrative profit. O'Gorman argues that this is a direct echo of the similar accusations made against Palissot in *Les Quand* (see above).⁹¹ Lui is jealous of geniuses and scornful of all philosophers, he is driven purely by self-interest, and his special task is to flatter his mistress in private and to express unequivocal support in public, a feature that recalls the charges of Fréron's sycophantic public flattery of *Les Philosophes*. Moreover, Diderot incorporates not only the attacks but also the language of the pamphlets. Particularly notable is the animalistic vocabulary, first present in *Les Philosophes* with the mention of Dortidius and his companions as 'wolves',⁹² and reprised both in *Les Quand*, which accuses Palissot of plotting with 'people of that species' and *Les Originaux*, which dismisses 'these species of men'⁹³. In *Le Neveu de Rameau* the motif is extended: the parasites are repeatedly referred to as both 'species' and 'beasts'. Here, though, they are merely examples of a much deeper problem: 'In nature, all species prey on each other; in society, people of all stations prey on each other too. We're forever passing sentence on each other without the law being involved.'⁹⁴

For a whole host of reasons, not least the complexity of the title character, a straightforward identification is flawed. The attacks made in Diderot's work are generalised and nuanced; moreover, it was not published in his lifetime, and there are no records of its ever having been read by a third party: it could therefore have no hope of either correcting Diderot's enemy or winning support for Diderot's position.

90 *Rameau's Nephew*, p. 68.

91 O'Gorman, *Diderot the Satirist*, p. 40.

92 I, ii.

93 *Les Originaux*, in Ferret, pp. 226–45, I, vi.

94 *Rameau's Nephew*, p. 42.

The occasional nature of personal satire implies it needs to appear in the moment if it is to have any impact, and Diderot's words, found decades later, lose their sting and immediate significance when the subjects are long dead. With this in mind, it would also seem misguided to argue that Diderot in fact entered fully into the spirit of his contemporaries' tit-for-tat exchange, holding out to take posthumous revenge and become, in the final words of the text, 'he who laughs last'. Nonetheless, that the critic closest to the time of the quarrel, Goethe, was particularly sensitised to this element, recognising the text as holding a place in the factional tradition, reveals how clear these similarities must have been in the period, and even the lack of publication cannot negate this fact. And perhaps particularly significant here is Diderot's awareness of the mechanics of factional quarrelling, demonstrated by the naming of his characters *Moi* and *Lui*.⁹⁵ Just as Palissot defined his enemies 'les philosophes', creating himself as an 'anti-philosophe' in the process, so *Moi* and *Lui* can only be defined in relation to one another, the one creating the other by his very existence.

*In shedding light on Diderot's text, and most notably on the dimension of combat present within it, Les Philosophes and its surrounding pamphlets illustrate a conception of literature as analysed by Sartre: if 'a book has its most absolute truth in its own time', if 'it is an emanation of intersubjectivity, a living embodiment of the rage, the hatred or the love between those who produced it and those who receive it', then 'to write for one's time is not to reflect it passively. It is to wish to maintain or change it, and therefore to go beyond it, into the future; and it is this effort to change it that situates us most profoundly within it.'*⁹⁶

The Translation Project

Indeed, it is the occasional nature of this play, paradoxically, that motivates this translation project. Critics, both contemporary and modern, have frequently questioned the intrinsic literary and dramatic quality of the text itself, and these misgivings might suggest that a translation is at

95 Marian Hobson, 'Déictique, dialectique dans le *Neveu de Rameau*', in *Etudes sur Le Neveu de Rameau et Le Paradoxe sur le comédien, Cahiers Textuels*, 11 (1992), ed. by George Benrekassa, Marc Buffat and Pierre Chartier, p. 11, p. 16.

96 Originally published in the review *Die Umschau* in 1946; reproduced in *Le Monde*, 16–17 April 2000, p. 15.

best pointless, and at worst, the artificial perpetuation of a text that is barely remembered in its original language.⁹⁷ However, its function as the way into this wider literary quarrel changes things. This text, in a recognisable dramatic format, with a plot and characters that seem (all too) familiar to us, is not only the keystone of the *encyclopédistes'* quarrel, but also perhaps its most accessible component, and thus opens up the whole episode to a broader audience. Moreover, the online editions published by Open Book Publishers allow us to extend its accessibility further. This is, as we have argued, a text that is part of a much bigger whole; a text, furthermore, that is full of references to texts and people that an Anglophone, non-specialist audience is likely to find off-putting or opaque. The ability to jump quickly to further information makes it immediately more legible, whilst the addition of links to the various quarrel texts where available (in their original form) allows the more specialist reader to follow the network of textual production in all its multiplications and ramifications. On a similar note, a final motivation for adopting this format was the existence of a bilingual edition of *Le Neveu de Rameau* in this very same series, wonderfully translated by Caroline Warman and Kate Tunstall. The links between Palissot's text and the infinitely more complex production by Diderot can now be tracked by an Anglophone audience.

The translation was a collaborative project, undertaken across the course of second-year language classes at St Catherine's College, Oxford, in 2017–2018. Taking our cue from the multi-handed *Encyclopédie*, rather than the combative quarrel texts, we approached the project in a spirit of co-operation and mutual support. In the early stages, the six students and I sketched out the challenges of this group project (length, consistency, early modern French, verse), and set out a plan. The edition from which we worked was Olivier Ferret's 2002 edition, based on the 1760 edition. All textual variants from later editions recorded in his footnotes have been omitted in order to avoid debates over the sorts of variants that could and could not be translated: the aim is an accessible translation, rather than a fully worked scholarly edition.⁹⁸ The only exception is the extra scene v, discussed above, since that is substantial enough to produce a coherent translation.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Delafarge, pp. 135–37.

⁹⁸ Ferret (pp. 82–85) also includes variants from the prompt's manuscript.

Our translation uses iambic pentameter, without rhyme, in place of the French Alexandrines. This decision was taken to preserve the somewhat clichéd feel of the original without forcing the English too much. The highly specific context of the play's production posed some challenges. Even as early as the 1782 edition, Palissot notes that the references in the bookseller scene (III, vi) have become unrecognizable for a contemporary audience: a translation across 250 years and into a different language necessarily increases this alienation several hundredfold. Our decision, then, was not to attempt a full cultural translation in which the references were as familiar to our readers as the original jibes were to the 1760 audience: such a translation would have been a wholly different text, and would have lost the key interest, for us, of this project; namely, its status as a way into the larger quarrel of which it forms a part. Instead, the translation maintains its specific setting and references, whilst extensive footnoting situates individuals and their works in the cultural landscape of mid-eighteenth-century Paris. We therefore retain the phrase 'philosophes', where possible, rather than translating it as 'philosophers', since the word had (and retains) a very specific charge in French. Similarly, characters and books referenced retain their French names and titles, and the odd use of 'Monsieur' or 'Madame', recalls to the reader the setting in a Parisian *salon*. The language used shifts between the formal and informal, reflecting the theme of role-playing: Marton, Crispin and the young lovers speak straightforwardly and pragmatically to one another, as — for the most part — do the so-called philosophes amongst themselves (reflecting their use of 'tu' in the original French); however, Cydalise takes on a more high-flown tone, as do the philosophes when they are trying to impress her.

The method we followed, though basic, might be of use to others wishing to take on similar projects; especially at a moment (2020-21) when online collaborative work is more common and more necessary due to social distancing. We worked through the play chronologically. Individuals translated sections and saved them in a shared Google Drive folder. These sections were read and commented upon by the rest of the group, using the comment function to make suggestions or insert queries regarding vocabulary, rhythm, synonyms, lost sense, etc. In class time, varying pairs of students worked through these annotated

sections, responding to questions, looking for better alternatives, and adding further annotations where necessary. Undertaking this editing in class time allowed students to share particularly difficult issues, and allowed me to monitor discussion and model different approaches to translation challenges (moving between verb/noun/adjective forms of words; shifting comic or rhythmic elements elsewhere in a sentence; exploring different sentence breaks; finding culturally appropriate alternatives). This could be approximated online by having different breakout rooms open on a video chat programme whilst the students worked on the translation. Finally, we all individually read through the text as a whole, making further annotations, which we used to refine and finalize the translation.

We hope that the publication will serve as a useful tool for colleagues teaching the text within Oxford and beyond. But it can also serve as a model of how a student translation project can be combined with a tutor's research interests to produce an output that is useful for a broader audience; involving the student in the move from the traditional 'lone scholar' model towards the team-based sort of project that is becoming increasingly common in Humanities research. Colleagues elsewhere are bound to know of similar un-translated texts in their own fields, to which the same model could be applied. By definition, such texts are likely to be the less canonical, more 'marginal' texts: such a project then also offers the opportunity to engage students (both here, and studying literature in translation elsewhere) in more unusual literary output; opening up the curriculum beyond the traditional authors and genres.

